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Finding Peace

Most people would give up everything they owned if they could find peace. Peace of mind, peace within their families, and peace at work. When our souls are at peace it is the most beautiful thing in the world. Christians say, "Peace be with you," Jews say, "Shalom," and Muslims greet each other by saying, "Salaam Alaikum."

Every human heart craves peace. Yet, until we realize that peace is an undeserved gift, something we cannot buy, produce, or create on our own, we are sunk and vulnerable to the many players in the world who are trying to tell us otherwise. Peace is a gift from God that comes only when we trust and follow him. It is grace. We can never control it; we can only receive it.



Have you ever tried to forgive yourself – over and over again, but with no success? Little wonder. We are not in control of our own lives; we are not the judges of our own lives, unless one is an atheist, agnostic, or a humanitarian. How presumptuous of us to think we are our own authority, that we are the ones who forgive ourselves. No, mercy and forgiveness come only from God, the one and only true judge of our lives.

Yet, saying there is an actual judge of our lives is hard for a lot of Baby Boomers to accept. For Baby Boomers, judgment is often considered uncool, because Boomers grew up believing everyone is free to do their own thing. But, ironically, God's judgment can be just as cool if we look at it the right way. If we recognize God's moral laws, admit we have transgressed them and ask for forgiveness through the sacrifice of his son on the cross, we are miraculously forgiven and given a brand-new start; we experience the most profound peace our souls have ever known.

Probably the most forgiving person I have ever met is Ivo Markovic, a Franciscan priest in Bosnia. When the Balkan wars were raging in the mid-1990s, Ivo Markovic stood out amongst his countrymen in ways the world is still recognizing. When Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia was under siege for nearly three years, Ivo and his fellow priests dug tunnels from their monastery to the landing strips of the airport in order to smuggle food, medical supplies and other needed goods for people starving and dying in that city. Ivo received awards from the United Nations and other international institutions and foundations for his bravery and valor during the conflict.

In 1998, I visited Sarajevo and met Ivo. At the time, he asked me and others to jump in a car and follow him to a certain section of the city. When we got out of the car, he pointed to a house and told us a story. He explained that this house was his boyhood home – up until last year. The house was now occupied and belonged to Bosnian Muslims. During the height of the conflict, these people among a larger mob had dragged Ivo's father from his home, along with 70 other elderly men in the town, took them to the top of a hill and shot them to death. And, now, Bosnian Muslim families were living in the dead men's homes.



As Ivo concluded his story, my friends and I sat in silence, our hearts aching and confused. But within that moment, Ivo motioned for us to follow him. The next thing we knew, we

were standing in front of Ivo's boyhood home as he knocked on the front door. The door opened and the Bosnian Muslim family greeted us as Ivo warmly greeted them back. There were smiles, even laughter and other exchanges of pleasantries. My friends and I were still engulfed in our stunned amazement. Ivo was showing us a level of mercy and forgiveness none of us had ever seen before. Apparently, Ivo had visited this family many times before since the death of his father, extending the peace of our Lord.



**Ivo meeting the
Muslim family in his
boyhood home**

During the Balkan conflict, there was total chaos in Bosnia. Neighbor fought neighbor. Serbian Orthodox, Croatian Catholics and Bosnian Muslims ripped each other apart. As Ivo told us, humanity in that region had been torn down to its rawest and lowest level of existence. Only the most radical demonstration of God's love and forgiveness would enable the people to move forward again. And Ivo was at the forefront of that work, creating peace initiatives and safe environments for dialogue among warring groups, which brought unlikely, yet tremendous healing to many people.

Ivo reminded us that when God gives us the greatest gift of all – unmerited forgiveness for our own transgressions – we are given the capability and responsibility to do the same for others.

Yet, how often do we receive such grace from God, become relieved in our own lives, but then turn around, judge others, harden our hearts, and leave our offenders in the cold? It is so easy to respond this way. And when we do, God weeps.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Matthew 7: 1-2: "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged."

As followers of Jesus, our job is to love and to forgive one another, admit our own sin, and leave the judging to God. This is the only way we can put our feet on the path which leads to peace.